

what's up?

What's it all about?

The subject of drugs and alcohol can be confusing for teens. Why is alcohol use glamorized in the media? Is marijuana harmful? Even experts disagree. These are tough questions for adults as well as teens. How much and how often a teen drinks determines whether there are any negative effects and how severe they are. For example, while most teens try alcohol in high school, few end up with drinking problems. Teens who use alcohol or drugs heavily often have other risk factors such as family problems or a history of physical or sexual abuse. Let's look at the facts!

What are the details?

- When asked if they have ever drunk more than a few sips of alcohol, two-thirds of Washington teens in grades 9 through 12 said yes. 44.1% indicate that they had at least one alcoholic drink in the past month. 28.3% drank heavily (5+ drinks) on at least one occasion within the past month.
- About a quarter of Washington teens report having their first alcoholic drink before age 13.
- 44.7% of Washington teens in grades 9 through 12 report ever having used marijuana. 25.2% report using it in the past month.
- 1 in 20 Washington teens tried marijuana before 13.
- Half to two-thirds of Washington high school students say marijuana and alcohol are easy to obtain.
- Washington teens are less likely to use cocaine than youth nationwide. Use of other kinds of drugs is similar for Washington and other U.S. teens.

Why does it matter?

The link to teen deaths

Alcohol is involved in about 35% of adolescent driver fatalities and about 40% of all adolescent drownings.

The link to substance abuse

The amount and frequency of alcohol and drug use are important factors in determining their negative effects. Teens who use alcohol and tobacco at an early age may be more likely to use other drugs later. Some may become dependent causing harm to themselves and others.

The link to school performance

Regular substance users (those who report having used within the 30 days before being surveyed) are 3 to 5 times more likely to give up on school, drop out of school at some time or be suspended.

The link to violence

1 in 3 regular users carry a weapon (32%) or were in a physical fight (33%) in the last month. More than a quarter (27%) were arrested in the last year.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

What can I do?

Talking to teens about drugs can be uncomfortable for adults. But if you don't talk to them about it, someone else will. Teens will be told many inaccurate things about drugs, from "everybody is doing it" to "it can't hurt you; I've been doing it for years and nothing has ever happened to me." Here are some tips adapted from information provided by Partnership for a Drug-Free America and the Drug Skills Prevention Center:

- Communicate. Listen carefully, and discuss any problems they are having with drugs and alcohol.
- Involve yourself. Participate in church, school and parent groups; communicate with the parents of your teen's friends.
- Love your children unconditionally. Let teens know you value them, even in times of trouble.
- Devote time. Help with homework, reading, sports or just talking.
- Encourage. Help teens to act independently and not to succumb to peer pressure. Encourage them to fulfill their hopes, dreams and goals.
- Teach and practice refusal skills. Role-play how to say no and remind kids what your values are about alcohol and drug use.
- Provide opportunities to practice independent decision-making.
- Provide accurate information. Give teens consistent, appropriate information about specific drugs.
- Establish clear family rules on drugs. Teach children to follow rules. Consistently enforce the rules you set.

Can we protect teens?

These factors can protect teens from getting involved in substance abuse:

- Provide lots of love, support and encouragement. Help a child learn to do something well.
- Establish and enforce rules against underage drinking and other drug use.
- Model low risk alcohol use and ask others in your community to do so as well.
- Discuss alcohol and tobacco advertising and marketing with youth.
- Talk to kids about your expectations regarding the use of alcohol and other drugs.
- Get involved in your child's education.
- Support proposed public policy changes likely to make your community a safer, healthier and more positively challenging environment.



**hot
links!**

Washington State Alcohol/Drug Prevention Clearinghouse 206-725-9595 or 800-662-9111
www.adhl.org/clearinghouse

Al-Anon and Alateen 1-888-4AI-ANON or www.al-anon.org

Partnership for a Drug-Free America www.drugfreeamerica.org/parents.html

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information Preventing Drug Use Among Children and Adolescents (1997). For free copies call: 1-800-729-6686

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Facts for Families Making Decisions about Substance Abuse Treatment (Fact Sheet #41)—www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/subabuse.htm

Washington State Department of Health Washington State Youth Risk Behavior Survey 1999—
www.doh.wa.gov/publicat/publications.htm

Washington Kids Count 206-685-7613 or http://hspsc.org/wko/swc_spring2000_report.html

National Institute on Drug Abuse Information on Common Drugs of Abuse—www.nida.nih.gov/Infobox/Infoboxindex.html

National Institutes of Health Adolescent alcohol resource page www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/alcoholandyouth.html

Washington State Department of Health
DOH Pub 910-120 11/2000

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